United Nations A/AC.183/SR.269

General Assembly

Distr.: General
19 March 2003

Original: English

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 269th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 14 February 2003, at 3 p.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. Riza (Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General)
Chairman: Mr. Fall ..... (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Election of officers

2. **The Temporary Chairman** invited the Committee to consider nominations for the posts of Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur of the Committee.

3. **Mr. Zackheos** (Cyprus) said that the Committee's programme of work for 2002 had been successfully implemented, and that its current composition should be maintained in order to ensure the same high level of performance in 2003. He therefore wished to propose Mr. Fall (Senegal) for re-election to the office of Chairman, Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) for re-election to the two offices of Vice-Chairman and Mr. Balzan (Malta) for re-election to the office of Rapporteur. He also wished to express appreciation to the Secretary-General for his untiring efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and to establish peace in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions.

4. **Ms. Ndhlovu** (South Africa) seconded the nominations.

5. *Mr. Fall (Senegal), Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba), Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) and Mr. Balzan (Malta) were elected by acclamation.*

6. *Mr. Fall (Senegal) took the Chair.*

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General

7. **Mr. Riza** (Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General), speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General, congratulated the Chairman and members of the Bureau on their unanimous re-election to the leadership of the Committee. The current situation between Palestinians and Israelis remained extremely dangerous. The world should not fall into the trap of imagining that it could not get any worse; it easily could. Already, the human cost of the crisis had been appalling. Since September 2000, more than 3,200 people had lost their lives — the great majority of them Palestinians, but also many Israelis. Thousands more on both sides had been wounded, again preponderantly Palestinians. Deplorably, the majority of the victims had been civilians, many of them children.

8. Stifling closures and curfews, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, house demolitions, continuing settlement activity and the often excessive use of force by Israel had only added to long-standing Palestinian anger and resentment. At the same time, cruel and devastating terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, including suicide bombings, had revived old fears. Because of that spiral of action and counteraction — because of that pervasive climate of recrimination, retribution and deep mutual distrust — the reserves of good will that had existed a decade ago seemed to have been virtually exhausted.

9. Still, there was a way out. A broad consensus had emerged on the need for a two-State solution. The "road map" that had been drawn up by the Quartet — the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations — aimed to help realize the vision, set out in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace. The "road map" was intended to achieve a settlement founded on the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, the principle of land for peace, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), agreements previously reached by the parties and the initiative of the Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, which had been endorsed by the Arab League at its Beirut summit in March 2002. The road map was performance-based and hope-driven, with clearly defined phases and realistic time lines and target dates. Its implementation would end the occupation that had begun in 1967, establish an independent, viable and democratic Palestine within three years, bring hope to Palestinians and ensure security for Israelis. It should settle not only the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also promote peace in the broader region, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks.

10. Achieving that objective would of course require great patience and tenacity on the part of all involved. One key factor would be the willingness of Palestinians and Israelis to take parallel steps in the security, institution-building, humanitarian and political areas. Indeed, progress in any one of those areas was heavily dependent on progress in the others. Moving ahead in tandem offered the most promising path away from the

current impasse and towards a reactivation of the political dialogue. The Quartet stood ready to facilitate that process. Ultimately, however, the parties themselves had to summon political will, show good faith and demonstrate a readiness to make the painful compromises that would fulfil the mutual obligations outlined in the "road map".

11. An important factor would be Palestinian reform. Efforts in that direction had already begun and should be viewed as part of the broader framework of steps outlined in the "road map." He urged the Government of Israel to support that Palestinian-driven process by creating conditions that would lead to the normalization of Palestinian life. In particular, Israel should expedite the withdrawal of its troops from Palestinian areas occupied since September 2000, immediately freeze all settlement activity, end the practice of house demolitions, lift restrictions on the movement of people, goods and essential services and disburse in full revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority. Israel should also abide fully by its obligations under international humanitarian law, especially the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention).

12. Palestinian groups for their part should unconditionally cease all terrorist acts, and the Palestinian Authority should do everything in its power to combat terrorism. As he had said repeatedly, attacks that targeted civilians were heinous and morally repellent, regardless of whether their perpetrators saw them as reprisals for acts by the other side.

13. International help remained vital. The Palestinian people were in dire need of humanitarian assistance and emergency relief. The Palestinian economy had suffered a catastrophic decline. United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), would continue their efforts. UNRWA remained the main provider of basic services to more than 3.9 million registered Palestine refugees. Commissioner-General Peter Hansen and his staff were helping to deliver those services in extremely difficult circumstances, often at risk to their own lives. UNRWA was currently facing an especially severe financial crisis. Unless the international community provided immediate assistance, the emergency operations of UNRWA in the West Bank and Gaza could come to a halt by the end of March. He called on donors to contribute generously in a time of acute hardship.

14. For his part, he wished to reassure the Committee of his deep personal commitment to working with all concerned for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement. His Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen, would continue to work closely with the parties. The outlines of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region were clear. But peace could not be imposed on the parties. Nor could a lasting solution be found by force. It must be achieved through a political process that took the legitimate aspirations of both peoples fully into account. The Committee had an important role to play as common efforts towards that long-sought goal continued. He wished it every success in its sustained and dedicated efforts.

Statement by the Chairman

15. **The Chairman**, speaking as the representative of Senegal, expressed his gratitude for the Committee's renewed confidence in Senegal, which he viewed as an incentive to pursue with increased fervour its work in advocating and promoting international recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty. He also paid tribute to his fellow officers for their dedication to the Palestinian cause and expressed gratitude for their assistance. Aware of the Secretary-General's concern over the deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinian people and the unprecedented humanitarian crisis it had triggered in the Middle East, he endorsed the Secretary-General's sound proposal to deploy a credible multinational force or international observers to break, for once and for all, the destructive cycle of violence and horror in that tormented part of the world.

16. The Committee urged the members of the Quartet — the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations — to redouble their efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the "road map" with a view to transforming into reality President Bush's vision, endorsed by the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Arab League Summit held in Beirut and contained in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002),

of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders. The Committee would continue to work tirelessly to mobilize international public opinion to remove the obstacles to peace with a view to bringing about the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. He wished to pay tribute to the vital role played by non-governmental organizations and civil society in mobilizing political support and economic assistance for the Palestinian people. The Committee's draft programme of work for 2003 contemplated greater cooperation with such entities, as well as parliaments, the media, universities and women's groups.

17. The past year had witnessed the pursuit of the intifada, in reaction to the provocation and the humiliation inflicted on the Palestinian people. The Committee was deeply distressed by the illegal and unacceptable acts imposed on the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority by the Hebrew State, in flagrant violation of the letter and spirit of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and in disregard of international humanitarian law. Against that backdrop, the United Nations had the obligation to continue assuming its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people until such time as their rights to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty were fully restored in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. In that connection, greater resources must be allocated to promoting the economic, social and cultural development of the future State of Palestine. The Committee was firmly committed to working with all the principal actors to seek a negotiated solution; given the historic, geographic and cultural links between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, there was no alternative to peaceful coexistence.

18. In conclusion he wished to pay tribute to Yasser Arafat for his courage, indomitable faith and qualities as a statesman, which had enabled him to resist, with great tranquillity, all the physical and psychological suffering deliberately and unjustly imposed on him by Tel Aviv. He as Chairman and the Committee members renewed their solemn commitment to continue to recommend to the General Assembly and Security Council any initiative for the peaceful attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to listen carefully to non-governmental organizations and civil society. He placed great hope in the imminent adoption of the peace plan elaborated by the Quartet, which he urged to work towards the convening of a Middle East peace conference that would give birth to the free and sovereign State of Palestine.

19. **Ms. Barghouti** (Observer for Palestine) said that it would not be easy for the Chairman to carry out his duties in the light of the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian lands and the occupation in general; however, she was confident that, under his leadership, major successes would nonetheless be achieved with the full backing of his own and many other countries. Her delegation would do its utmost to ensure that the Chairman was given all the necessary support and cooperation to that end. She also wished to express appreciation to the Division for Palestinian Rights for its excellent work, and to the Secretary-General for his efforts, which reflected his personal commitment to a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and to achieving both the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including independence and sovereignty, and peace in the Middle East. Her delegation also looked forward to working with the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs to bring about an independent Palestine.

Report by the Chairman on developments since the previous meeting

20. **The Chairman** noted the overwhelming support of the General Assembly for the four resolutions submitted to it by the Committee. The General Assembly's vote had made clear the importance attached by the vast majority of States to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and had reaffirmed the fact that the responsibility of the United Nations concerning the question of Palestine would not end until all aspects of the question were settled.

21. On 29 November 2002, he had met with members of the Steering Committee of non-governmental organizations established at the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People to brief them on the mandate of the Committee and its work with civil society worldwide. The members had in turn informed him of their own activities and initiatives in support of the Palestinian people and suggested ways of improving cooperation and coordination between the Committee and civil society.

22. On 20 December 2002, the Security Council had met to consider the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". On that occasion the Syrian Arab Republic had introduced a draft resolution by which the Council would, in particular, condemn the killing by the Israeli occupying forces of several United Nations employees and demand that Israel should comply with its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Following discussion, the Council had voted on the draft, which had received 12 votes in favour and two abstentions, but had not been adopted because of a negative vote by a permanent member.

23. On 13 January 2003, he had addressed a letter on behalf of the Committee to the Permanent Representative of Greece, whose country currently held the presidency of the European Union, expressing the Committee's sincere wish to see the useful dialogue established between the Committee and the delegation of the European Union in 1997 continue to develop and strengthen over the following six months.

24. On 30 January 2003, he had addressed a letter to the Secretary-General expressing the Committee's position regarding the closure by the Israel Defense Forces of Hebron University and Palestine Polytechnic University. Such action was deemed by the Committee to constitute flagrant and illegal acts of collective punishment. He had accordingly requested the Secretary-General to bring the matter to the attention of the international community, and had urged the Secretary-General to use his good offices with the Government of Israel in order that the situation would be redressed and the two universities reopened without delay.

25. If there were no other comments, he would take it that the Committee wished to take note of the information he had presented.

26. *It was so decided.*

Draft programme of work of the Committee (A/AC.183/2003/CRP.1)

27. **The Chairman**, introducing the draft programme of work for 2003 contained in document A/AC.183/2003/CRP.1, noted that section I summarized the resolutions adopted at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly concerning the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information.

28. Under section II of the draft programme dealing with priority issues, he drew attention to paragraphs 8, 9 and 10, in which the Committee expressed the view that its programme of activities made a valuable contribution to heightening international awareness of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, stressed the need for continued support to the political process, and referred to the importance of cooperation and coordination between the Department of Public Information and the Division for Palestinian Rights.

29. The activities of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights, outlined under section III, included action taken to promote understanding of the Committee's objectives, organize meetings and conferences, enhance cooperation with civil society, develop the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, and implement the Division's publications programme.

30. *The draft programme of work of the Committee for 2003 (A/AC.183/2003/CRP.1) was adopted.*

Developments in the Middle East peace process and the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem

31. **The Chairman** said that several important events had taken place since the previous meeting. At the same time, the situation on the ground remained extremely serious and the humanitarian crisis was becoming more grave with each passing day. He invited the Observer for Palestine to take stock of the situation and explain the Palestinian position.

Statement by the Permanent Observer for Palestine

32. **Ms. Barghouti** (Observer for Palestine) said that there were regrettably no positive developments to report on in the period. The Palestinian people continued to suffer from the wrath and brutality of the occupying forces and every aspect of life had been affected by the Israeli military campaign. The return of the Likud government to power had only strengthened the hand of the Israeli right wing against the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority.

33. The implementation of the Quartet's Road Map and peace efforts continued to be delayed and even obstructed, and peace efforts, such as the London

Conference convened by Prime Minister Blair, continued to be undermined. The Palestinian people under Israeli occupation continued to suffer extreme hardships, including further loss of life, injury and destruction at the hands of the occupying forces, including colonial settlers. The total number of Palestinians killed by the Israeli occupying forces since September 2000 had surpassed 2,100 martyrs.

34. During the same period, the occupying Power had continued and even intensified its wanton destruction of Palestinian homes, properties, vital infrastructure and agricultural lands. In addition, the Palestinian economy had also suffered gravely as a result of the occupying Power's continued imposition of the severest restrictions on the movement of persons and goods, including for medical and humanitarian purposes, throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Twenty-four hour curfews continued to be imposed on the Palestinian civilian population, and in recent weeks several Palestinian universities and radio and television stations had been subjected to military closures. The imposition of such forms of collective punishment by Israel not only hampered normal Palestinian activity, but had also greatly hindered the work of United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations providing assistance to the Palestinian people. Such restrictions had also seriously obstructed the functioning of the Palestinian Authority, including obstruction of the holding of the Palestinian general election that had been scheduled for January 2003.

35. The constant Israeli military siege on the Occupied Palestinian Territory had further deepened the dire humanitarian crisis being faced by the Palestinian people. That tragic situation could only continue to deteriorate with the ongoing perpetration of Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people, in serious violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

36. Although it was difficult to be optimistic about the near future, she remained hopeful that the international community would intensify political efforts towards bringing an end to the Israeli occupation, which was the root source of all the strife and misery, and towards the achievement of a final and peaceful settlement, including the establishment of the independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The meeting rose at 3.15 p.m.